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ABSTRACT

This document discusses the goals of multiethnic education, its usefulness for educational reform, and common practices in multiethnic programs. There is a need for all children to learn about other cultures in order to gain greater understanding by viewing themselves from different perspectives. Teachers of multiethnic education should try to counter prejudices and stereotypes which children learn involuntarily from the media, adults, and society. Merely focusing on ethnic holidays and minority group heroes does not provide students with a conceptual interdisciplinary perspective on particular ethnic groups. Multiethnic education should reach beyond classroom curricula to include ethnic diversity in school staff, attitudes, teaching strategies and materials, testing and counseling, and school norms. As a vehicle for educational reform, multiethnic education provides an opportunity for conceptual teaching, value inquiry, and interdisciplinary approaches to the study of social issues. A bibliography of nine recommended resources is included. (AV)

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MULTIETHNIC EDUCATION: A VEHICLE FOR EDUCATIONAL REFORM*

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Goals of Multiethnic Education

A key goal of multiethnic education is to provide students with cultural and ethnic alternatives and to reduce ethnic encapsulation. Historically, the school curriculum has focused primarily on the culture of the Anglo-American child. The school was, and often is, primarily an extension of the Anglo-American child's home and community and does not present him or her with cultural and ethnic alternatives.

Individuals who only know, participate in, and see the world from their unique cultural and ethnic perspectives are denied important parts of the human experience and are culturally and ethnically encapsulated. Culturally and ethnically encapsulated individuals are unable to fully know and see their own cultures because of their cultural and ethnic blinders. We can get a full view of our own cultures and behaviors only be viewing them from the perspectives of other racial and ethnic cultures. A major goal of multiethnic education is to help individuals gain greater self-understanding by viewing themselves from the perspectives of other cultures.

Another major goal of multiethnic education is to provide all students with the skills, attitudes, and knowledge which they need to function within their ethnic culture, the mainstream culture, as well as within and across other ethnic cultures. The Anglo-American child should be familiar with Black English; the Afro-American child should be able to speak and write Standard English and to function successfuly within Anglo-American institutions.

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*This essay is based on the authors's forthcoming book, Multiethnic Education: Practices and Promises (Bloomington, Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1977). This publication, which will be in the Phi Delta Kappa Fastback Series, is scheduled for publication in April, 1977).

Multiethnic education also tries to reduce the pain and discrimination which members of some ethnic and racial groups experience in the schools and in the wider society because of their unique racial, physical, and cultural characteristics. Individuals who are Filipino Americans, Afro-Americans, Jewish Americans, and Polish Americans often deny their ethnic identity, ethnic heritage, and family in order to assimilate and to participate more fully in America's social, economic, and political institutions. As Mildred Dickeman has insightfully pointed out, schools often force members of these groups to experience "self-alienation" in order to succeed. This is a high price to pay for educational, social and economic mobility.

An important goal of multiethnic education is to help students to master essential reading, writing, and computational skills. Multiethnic education assumes that multiethnic content can help students to master important skills in these areas. Multiethnic readings and data, if taught effectively, can be highly motivating and meaningful. Students are more likely to master skills when the teacher uses content which deals with significant human problems, such as ethnicity within our society. Students are also more likely to master skills when they study content and problems related to the world in which they live. All American children live in a society where ethnic problems are real and salient. Many students live within highly ethnic communities. Content related to ethnicity in American society and to the ethnic communities in which many students live is significant and meaningful to students, especially to those who are socialized within ethnic communities.

Multiethnic Education: Practices

Teachers often assume that children are unaware of racial differences and that they will merely "create" problems by making the study of ethnicity an integral part of the curriculum. Over the years, research has consistently shown that very young children, even before they enter kindergarten, are aware of racial differences and very soon internalize the evaluations of different races that are widespread within their culture. Children learn about race long before they enter school from their parents, television, cartoons, and movies. Unfortunately, many of the ideas and attitudes which children learn from the wider society are negative, stereotypic, and damaging. Multiethnic education assumes that the teacher should take an active part in the child's ethnic education and help to counter some of the prejudices and stereotypes which children learn from the media, adults, and the wider society.

Many teachers say that they do not get involved in problems related to race and ethnicity because they don't see the colors and racial characteristics of their students. Such teachers claim that they "treat all students the same, whether they are black, brown, blue or red." Teachers who make this claim usually have the best intentions and want to treat all of their students fairly. However, in their attempts to deny the ethnic and racial characteristics of their students, they may be failing to respond to the unique needs of many of their Black, Mexican American, Jewish American, and Italian American students. Many students who belong to these groups have no problems which result from their ethnicity. However, some have special needs which the teacher should respond to deliberately and sensitively.

Many teachers say that they would like to teach about ethnicity and race but they don't have any Blacks or other ethnic minority students in their classes. While such teachers have good intentions, they have some misconceptions about the nature of ethnicity and about the goals of multiethnic education. They assume that ethnic studies is the study of "them," meaning ethnic peoples of color, and that American Studies is the study of "us," meaning Anglo-Americans.

Ethnicity is a broad concept which is often misunderstood by educators. Social scientists define an ethnic group as a group with a unique culture, heritage, tradition, and some unique value orientations, beliefs and behavior. An ethnic group is also a political and economic interest group. This broad definition of an ethnic group suggests that all Americans are members of ethnic groups, including Anglo-Americans, Irish Americans, and German Americans. However, many white ethnic group individuals who have experienced total assimilation are ethnically Anglo-Americans. Also, a person's level of identity with his or her ethnic group may vary from zero to total identification.

When a broad definition of an ethnic group is used to conceptualize and design school programs related to ethnicity, ethnic studies becomes the study of both "us" and "them," and not just the study of ethnic peoples of color or ethnic minority groups. A major goal of ethnic studies, conceptualized in this way, is to help the individual to better understand self by looking at his/her culture and behavior through the perspective of another culture. In a sound multiethnic curriculum, the teacher helps each child to see that he or she is a member of many different groups and that the ethnic group is one of the many groups to which he or she belongs. One's attachment and identity with these various groups varies with the

individual, the times in his or her life, and the situations and/or settings in which an individual finds himself/herself.

Many teachers see ethnic studies as essentially additive to the major curriculum thrust. They believe that multiethnic education consists primarily of adding facts about ethnic minority heroes to the list of Anglo-American heroes that are already taught. Other teachers view multiethnic education primarily as the study of the "strange" and "exotic" customs and behavior of ethnic groups and as the celebration of ethnic holidays and birthdays. Teachers who view multiethnic education in this way often have students build tepees and igloos, and make and eat ethnic foods such as chitlins, enchiladas, and chow mein. We might think of this as the "chitlin and tepee" approach to multiethnic education.

Both of these approaches to multiethnic education are problematical. The "hero approach" tends to emphasize the experiences of selected heroes, many of whom are of questionable historical significance, rather than the total experiences and problems of ethnic groups, viewed from a comparative, conceptual, and interdisciplinary perspective. Often children learn little about the total experiences of an ethnic group when they only study its heroes.

By focusing on the experiences of ethnic groups only on special days and holidays, teachers are likely to reinforce the notion that ethnic groups are not integral parts of American society and culture. Students are likely to conclude that "Black history" and "American history" are separate things. Rather than being isolated on special days, Black history, as well as Chicano and Jewish history, ought to be integral parts of the daily instructional program. Thus, everyday in the classroom ought to be Black day, Chicano day, and Jewish American day.

Multiethnic Education: Nature and Promises

Multiethnic education reaches far beyond ethnic studies or the social studies. It is concerned with modifying the total educational environment so that it is more reflective of the ethnic diversity within American society. This includes not only the study of ethnic cultures and experiences but making institutional changes within the school so that student from diverse ethnic groups have equal educational opportunities and the school promotes and encourages the concept of ethnic diversity.

Multiethnic education is designed for all students, of all races, ethnic groups, and social classes, and not just for schools which have racially and ethnically mixed populations. A major assumption made by advocates of multiethnic education is that multiethnic education is needed as much if not more by the Anglo-American middle class suburban child as it is by the Mexican American child who lives in the barrio.

Since multiethnic education is a very broad concept which implies total school reform, educators who want their schools to become multiethnic must examine their total school environment to determine the extent to which it is monoethnic and Anglo-Centric, and take appropriate steps to create and sustain a multiethnic educational environment. The ethnic and racial composition of the school staff, its attitudes, the formalized and hidden curricula, the teaching strategies and materials, the testing and counseling program, and the school's norms are some of the factors which must reflect ethnic diversity within the multiethnic school. These and other variables of the school environment which must be reformed in order to make the school multiethnic are illustrated in Figure 1.

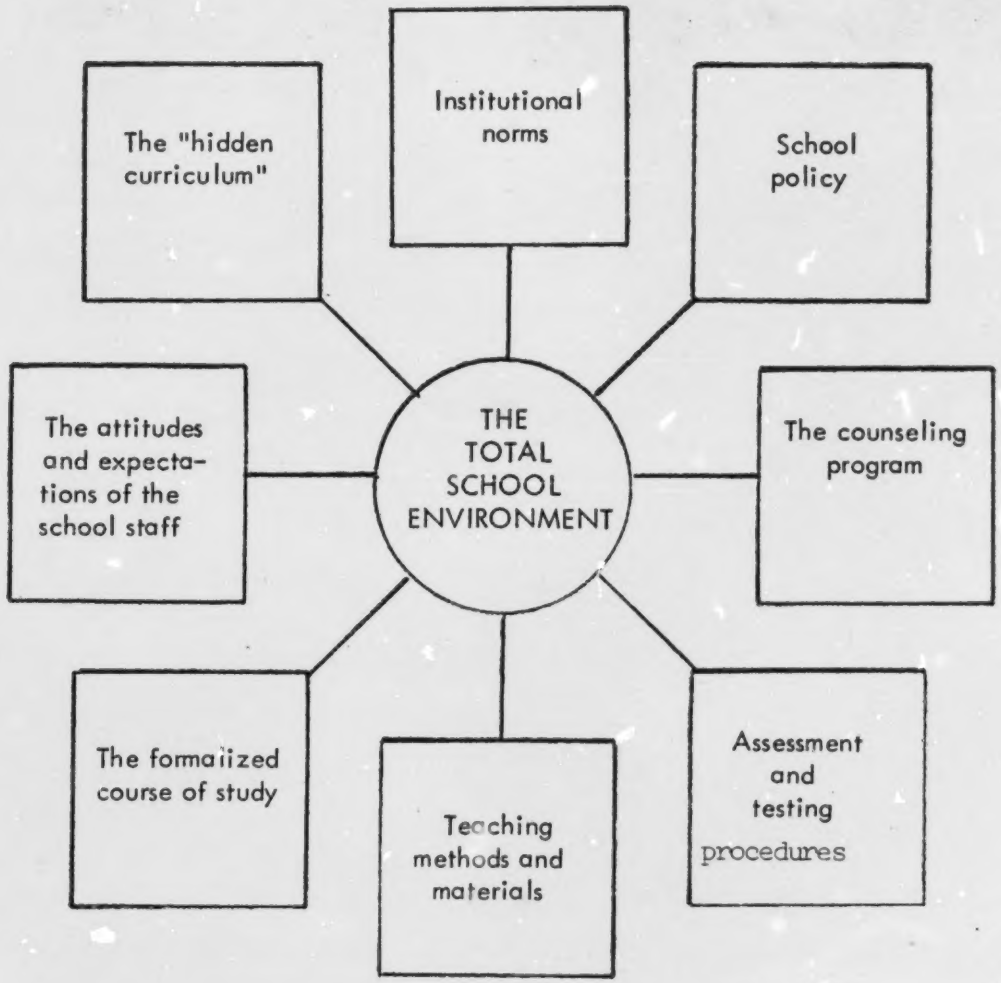

Figure 1. The Total School Environment. In this figure, the total school environment is conceptualized as a system which consists of a number of major identifiable factors, such as school policy, the institutional norms, and the formalized curriculum or course of study. In the idealized multiethnic school, each of these factors reflects ethnic pluralism. While any one of these factors may be the focus of initial school reform, changes must take place in each of them to create and sustain an effective multiethnic educational environment.

The reform must be system-wide to be effective. While any one of the factors in Figure 1 may be the initial focus for school reform, changes must take place in all of the major school variables in order for multiethnic education to be successfully implemented. We learned from the ethnic studies movement of the 1960's that few substantial changes take place when you simply give teachers multiethnic materials but do not train them to use them or help them to acquire new conceptual frameworks for viewing American society and culture.

The total school environment must be the unit of change, and not any one element, such as materials, teaching strategies, the testing program, or teacher training. While teacher training is very important, other changes must take place in the school environment in order to reform the school. Many teachers attain new insights, materials, and multiethnic teaching strategies during summer workshops. They are eager to try them in their schools. However, they become very discouraged when they return to their schools in the Fall where traditional norms toward ethnic diversity often exist and where they frequently get no support from their administrators or peers. Without such support, teachers with new skills and insights give up and revert back to their old behaviors and attitudes.

Multiethnic Education and Educational Reform

Changing the school so that it reflects the ethnic diversity within American society provides a tremendous opportunity to implement the kinds of radical curriculum reforms which are essential, such as conceptual teaching, interdisciplinary approaches to the study of social issues, value inquiry, and providing students with opportunities to become involved in social action and social participation activities. Thus multiethnic education can serve as a vehicle for general and radical education reform.

This is probably its greatest promise. We can best view multiethnic education as a process as well as a reform movement that will result in a new type of schooling that will present novel views of the American experience and help students to acquire the knowledge, skills, and commitments needed to make our nation and our world more responsive to the human condition.

Recommended Resources

James A. Banks, Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1975.

James A. Banks, Multiethnic Education: Practices and Promises. Bloomington, Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1977.

H. Prentice Baptiste, Multicultural Education: A Synopsis. Houston, Texas: University of Houston, College of Education, 1976.

Carlos E. Cortés with Fay Metcalf and Sharryl Hawke, Understanding You and Them: Tips for Teaching About Ethnicity. Boulder, Colorado: Social Science Education Consortium, 1976.

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Ricardo L. Garcia, Learning in Two Languages. Bloomington, Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1976.

Judith Herman, ed., The School and Group Identity: Educating for a New Pluralism. New York: American Jewish Committee, 1974.

Alice Miel with Edwin Kiester, Jr., The Shortchanged Children of Suburbia. New York: American Jewish Committee, 1967.

The NCSS Task Force on Ethnic Studies Curriculum Guidelines (James A. Banks, Carlos E. Cortés, Geneva Gay, Ricardo L. Garcia and Anna S. Ochoa), Curriculum Guidelines for Multiethnic Education. Arlington, Virginia: National Council for the Social Studies, 1976.